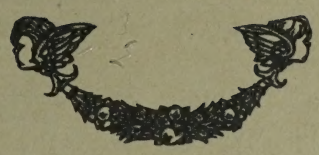


Abraham Lincoln—the Seer

Some Biblical and Hebraic Traits

By

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By EMANUEL HERTZ

WHEN, prior to the secession of the South, Union officials under the very eyes of Buchanan had laid deep plans for dismembering the army and stationing most of it at distant points; for making ineffective what there was of the navy, for stealing the funds, the property, the arsenals, the forts of the Union; when army officers and Cabinet officers alike were conspiring to bring about the undoing of the Republic, what manner of man was he who came upon the scene at such a time and dared to announce that right made might? His oath was taken. Under it he had one goal to achieve. All else mattered little. With that end in view he chose his associates and his co-workers. He knew what the people wanted and when public opinion was ripe for action.

A heathen potentate, a Talmudic legend tells us, heard of the wonderful achievement of Moses and was intensely concerned in the reports that reached him. He could not believe that mortal man was capable of such accomplishment and was determined to see and know this wonderful leader of a wonderful people. He sent his court painter to portray Moses in order that his physiognomists might analyze the character of Moses from the portrait. The examination of the picture indicated that Moses was a man of low type, with hardly a redeeming feature. The king was shocked and exclaimed: "He is the great Moses! You must be mistaken!" The physiognomists were unanimous in the opinion that their analysis was justified by the features as painted. The painter, too, insisted that his work was true to life

and accurate in every detail. The king decided to seek the truth himself and determined to see for himself this greatest of leaders. The king soon found Moses and explained his mission. After a moment of silence, Moses replied: "The artist's painting was accurate and the physiognomists' interpretations were proper. I studied myself and realized that I must correct my faults, which were many, and by diligent application and untiring patience I have at last mastered myself; that is the greatest achievement of my life."

To those who had perennially been concerned about the looks, the manners, the clothes, of the great War President, who were shocked at the possibility of his occupying the place filled by that series of cultured and polished gentlemen—Polk, Pierce, Fillmore, Buchanan—the tale told of the ancient lawgiver might have proved comforting.

But not in this important detail alone did Lincoln resemble the great lawgiver. I have on another occasion traced the resemblance between lawgiver and Emancipator—from the Midianitish desert, when Moses was summoned from the burning bush, to the youthful Lincoln in the slave market in New Orleans, when the latter felt the call to destroy the hated institution. Step by step the two great souls traveled in parallel courses—milenia apart—but both on the same errand bent—one to lead his people through the wilderness and prepare it for the first government by the edicts of God as transmitted from Sinai's

fiery mountain top; the other to lead his country through the fiery furnace of Civil War and reunite and cement the Union upon the principle of equality of all before the law, regardless of color or of creed. How one stood on Mount Nebo and the other was shot down at the very moment of the supreme achievement of his purposes, is an oft-repeated tale. Both men were confronted by similar problems, both faced and defied their Pharaohs, and both won—the Pharaohs are dead and forgotten, no one too humble to do them reverence. Both Moses and Lincoln, by their exalted and mighty performances, have become parts of the religious and intellectual life of the world to such an extent that no conceivable cataclysm or holocaust which might involve the whole world can in the least mar or dim the beacon-light of their souls and of their service to benighted worlds.

Abraham Lincoln seemed to find solace and light in the Book of Books—in the Bible, the book of the people of the great lawgiver. The Bible permeated his life from the very beginnings, when it was his whole library. This was later augmented by "Pilgrim's Progress," another Biblical plant, and Weems' "Life of Washington," written by one of the preachers and teachers of the Bible. And the Bible was with him throughout his solitudes in the wilderness, and it remained with him when he was alone in the White House. It was with him when he was warned of danger. It was with him in his debates with Douglas, cropping out in the "house divided" utterance, which gave notice to the expectant world that a new leader had arisen. The Bible was with him when he pronounced his two inaugural addresses, which read like pages from Holy Writ. The Bible—not Homer—formed the ideals of Lin-

coln. Not the Republic of Greece, but the Hebrew Commonwealth was to him the pattern for this Democracy. Not Athens, but Jerusalem was to him, and to all of us, the cradle of human liberty. His love for his country, his people, his government, was equalled only by the love of the Jews for their land, hoped for, longed for, prayed for these two thousand years—practicing their religion in the face of the most chilling opposition of a hostile world.

His ideal of political equality incorporated also the Jewish ideal of social equality. His love for the stranger was purely Jewish: "Love the stranger, for you have been strangers in Egypt." Note what Lincoln said on February 12, 1861: "Inasmuch as our country is extensive and new, and the countries of Europe are densely populated, if there are any abroad who desire to make this the land of their adoption, it is not in my heart to throw aught in their way to prevent them from coming to the United States." Where were the spokesmen for liberal immigration—our spokesmen—who allowed the new law to be placed upon our statute books without a solemn protest in Lincoln's name?

How he drew the Jewish people to his side, although their number was small in those days, may be seen in the incident of the silk flag sent him upon his leaving Springfield for Washington, by his friend, Jonas, of Chicago, and in the declaration of the leading Jewish minister of his day, the founder of the Reform movement in America and one of the most virile men of his time—Isaac Mayer Wise—founder of the Hebrew Union College, and the first teacher of Reform Judaism in America. In his funeral sermon in Lodge Street Temple on April 28, 1865, he said:

"Brethren, the lamented Abraham Lincoln, believed to be bone from our bone and flesh from our flesh, is supposed to be a descendant of Hebrew parentage. He said so in my presence. And, indeed, he preserved numerous features of the Hebrew race, both in countenance and character."

We find him steeped in Bible-lore, in Bible diction, in Bible thought. His parables, stories and tales are those of the sages, teachers and prophets of Israel. And how convincing, how definitive, how complete is his repartee, his final retort or reply to all those who tried to traduce, who tried to swerve him from his appointed course. Whether misguided friend or treacherous foe, this student and offspring of the Bible ever pronounced the final, the convincing, the comforting, the concluding word. When Lincoln had spoken, the delegation withdrew. When Lincoln decided, Stanton, Seward, Chase, Grant and Sherman carried the decision into execution. There was no appeal. When he read his Emancipation Proclamation, he sought no advice. The time was ripe and the Proclamation was made and carried into effect. When the war was over, Grant was notified that his work was done; that he, Lincoln, would attend to the reconstruction problems.

Herndon was in the habit of complaining that Lincoln would come to the office and read the newspapers or the legal documents aloud—aloud! How truly Hebraic! Imagine the old teachers of the Bible, of the Talmud, reading their sacred books in any other manner! He read aloud, so that the ear might hear what the tongue—what the lips had spoken.

He was ever on the alert to drive a lesson home. Read his reproof of the Jewish Minister who came on the Sabbath Day to seek a commission in the army for his son. Adolphus S. Solomons relates the occurrence:

"The day that Lincoln issued one of his early war proclamations I chanced to be at the White House with a distinguished New York Rabbi, Dr. Morris J. Raphael, who came to Washington to ask for the promotion of his son, Alfred, from a second to a first lieutenant in the army. The White House was closed for the day when we got there, but upon sending up my card we gained admittance, and after Lincoln had heard the Rabbi's request, he blurted out: 'As God's minister, is it not your first duty to be at home today, to pray with your people for the success of our arms, as is being done in every loyal church throughout the North, East and West?' The Rabbi, evidently ashamed of his faux pas, blushing, made answer: 'My assistant is doing that duty.' 'Ah,' said Lincoln, 'that is different.' The President then drew forth a small card and wrote the following upon it:

"The Secretary of War will promote
Second Lieutenant Raphael to a First
Lieutenant.
A. LINCOLN."

Handing the card to the Rabbi, he said, with a smile all his own: 'Now, Doctor, you can go home and do your own praying.'

He was intensely Jewish in his hatred of oppression and of tyranny, not only of the slave, but of any other people. In 1859 a panic was produced among the managers of the Republican party by the final adoption on May 9, 1859, in a State referendum by the people of Massachusetts, of what was currently called the "Two Year Amendment to the Constitution," whereby the right of voting and holding office in the Old Bay State was denied to the foreign-born until they could certify a residence within the United States of seven years, with naturalization as a prerequisite therein. Abraham Lincoln wrote to a fellow-townsmen of Springfield, Dr. Theodore Canisius, editor of a then recently established German paper, as follows:

"Massachusetts is a sovereign and independent State; and it is no privilege of mine to scold her for what she does. Still, if from what she has done an inference is sought to be drawn as to what I would do, I may, without impropriety, speak out. I say, then, that as I understood the Massachusetts provision, I am against its adop-

tion in Illinois, or in any other place where I have a right to oppose it. Understanding the spirit of our institutions to aim at the *elevation* of men, I am opposed to whatever tends to *degrade* them. I have some little notoriety for commiserating the oppressed condition of the negro; and I should be strangely inconsistent if I should favor any project for curtailing the existing rights of *white men*, even though born in different lands and speaking different languages from myself."

This, like all his momentous utterances, has the ring of true metal. This letter of Lincoln's was a model of conciseness and lucidity of pith and point. He expresses dissent and disapproval. His language is luminous and fearless. On this, as on all occasions of grave importance, he was guided by basic principles and not by vagrant winds of popular prejudice and passion or by the fitful gusts of popular fancy or fury. Even more conclusive proof of this assertion is afforded us in his striking letter to his boyhood friend, Joshua F. Speed, on August 24, 1855, in which he says:

"I am not a Know-nothing; that is certain. How could I be? How can anyone who abhors the oppression of negroes be in favor of degrading classes of white people? Our progress in degeneracy appears to be pretty rapid. As a Nation we began by declaring that 'All men are created free and equal.' We now practically read it: 'All men are created equal, except negroes.' When Know-nothings get control—'All men are created equal except negroes, foreigners and Catholics!' When it comes to this, I shall prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretence of loving liberty—to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, and without even the base alloy of hypocrisy."

Instances might be multiplied, occurrences in his life might be heaped up to demonstrate that he lived the life of the ancient lawgiver. How fitting that he should have been named "Abraham" after the one who promulgated the first doctrine of freedom and equality—monotheism. Try to append another name to Lincoln and see the result.

And so, with the eternal Book in his hand, he had the rare fortune of painting his own immortal portrait on the colossal canvas of American history—which has not been equalled, which may never be equalled again. The seer in him, of course, as in his great prototype, foresaw all—Bull Run as well as Appomatox—appreciated all, and rose to his full stature on every occasion. Gettysburg is but an illustration of his everperfect preparedness.

They tell us that Tycho Brahe, the father of astronomy, sat an entire lifetime in his watch-tower and recorded the movements of heavenly bodies in their courses. His figures, his calculations, his deductions, his charts, remained the storehouse upon which his followers relied and drew for information for succeeding centuries—and do so at this time. Lincoln, from the age when an unknown word or phrase would haunt him until he had mastered its meaning, to the last address when he announced his policy to the South on the evening of April 13, 1865, was ever prepared. In the Western deserts, in the primeval forests, on the prairies of the West, he had thought upon these problems, and had evolved a clear and unassailable theory of life and of government, which enabled him to deliver his first great address at the first Republican Convention, which carried him through the debate with Douglas, through Cooper Union into the Presidency, through the Emancipation Proclamation to Gettysburg Cemetery, and to the second inaugural. Not unlike the inspired astronomer, he, too, left to posterity a collection of documents: State papers, letters, speeches, and discourses on the theory of government, such as has been transmitted by few other mortals from the days of Moses to this day.

Carr, who heard him and who, like all others, began to perceive the quality of the short address after he had

read the judgment of the best minds in England's periodicals—concludes his article as follows, an extract rarely, if ever, quoted:

"In human achievement that which is greatest in proportions is not always the most sublime. A traveller who had visited the mighty structures along the Nile, the pyramids, the temples, the palaces, the tombs, surpassing in grandeur any others that have so far as we know in all the ages, been reared, at last found himself in a little city of Southern Europe, standing upon an eminence before a structure so limited in extent and amplitude as not to compare in these regards with the mighty edifices whose grandeur had so filled his mind with wonder and awakened in his bosom emotions that overwhelmed him. He was standing upon the Acropolis at Athens and contemplating the Parthenon. In his travels and study he had gained sufficient knowledge of architecture to be a connoisseur. As he made more careful examination and study of the wonderful temple, its splendors and sublimity gradually dawned upon him. He found that in every element of its construction, in form, in grace, in beauty and strength, and character, and in the nobility and grandeur of all its appointments, it far surpassed everything he had hitherto seen, every other architectural achievement upon the face of the earth. In this conclusion he was and is confirmed by the general consensus of opinion of the world.

"Philosophers and sages, men of literary culture, who have explored the labyrinths, stood upon the heights and basked in the glories of the sublime creations of Demosthenes, Pericles and Cicero, of Burke and Pitt and Brougham, of Webster, Sumner and Everett, and in the elaborate and finished triumphs of oratory of all the ages, are moved with similar emotions to those of this traveller in contemplating Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. By universal consent, it has become the Parthenon of oratorical creation.

"In the region round about Athens, marble, cement and clay and everything necessary to the construction of an edifice, are as abundant and cheap as the sods upon the prairie. To these commonplace materials, the inspired architect gave form and beauty and strength and life. Out of a few, simple, plain, commonplace, sentences familiar to all, President Lincoln constructed an oration that will be the wonder and admiration of the world for all time—the crowning triumph of literary achievement."

He struck slavery even as Moses did. He heard the voice of God—even as young Samuel did, while Eli, representing the old order, heard not the Divine call. The Southern hierarchy saw nothing and heard nothing of what Lincoln saw and heard. His parables, like those of the sages (they hardly ever attempt to inculcate a lesson without a parable or a story), the very prayers, are filled with simile, with tale, with story.

The man, Moses, was very modest: Lincoln's modesty became manifest when a candidate for his first office—"If elected, I shall be thankful; if not, it will be all the same."

The man Moses became very great. The plain people revered him: Thirty millions revered Lincoln whose descendants now number over a hundred millions, and continue to revere him, as do the people revere Moses above any other man.

The man Moses went to Pharaoh until driven out: Lincoln pleaded with the South until the assault on Fort Sumter.

Moses had his defeatists—the spies, the princes of the Tribes: Lincoln had his defeatists—the Seymours, the Greeleys, the Manton Marbles, the Woods.

Moses was always ahead of his people—ahead of his times: Lincoln had his dreams in 1858; he was ready—his people were not; not until 1865 when all saw and understood.

Moses, while he was receiving the Decalogue, the code which made man free, came back and found them dancing around a golden calf: Lincoln while delivering his first inaugural in the Capitol, was surrounded by the hugest and most ghastly conspiracy to destroy a free people.

Moses mastered his rebellious people: Lincoln mastered his rebellious people.

Moses again and again pleaded and interceded for the sinners, to save them from deserved punishment: Lincoln pleaded for forgiveness, for kindness, and had he lived, his theory of reconstruction would have saved oceans of tears, unwarranted cruelty of withering injustice.

Moses had traitors in his camp: Lincoln had traitors in his camp.

Moses kept his people from foreign entanglements: Lincoln kept his people from foreign entanglements. "One war at a time," but the latter was contemplating, with true Lincoln humor, sending Seward as ambassador to England to procure a "reckoning."

Moses grew in stature, authority, respect, love, appreciation from day to day: so did Lincoln. Lincoln could have done anything after his second inaugural day; he had a solid nation behind him.

Moses left his legacy in Deuteronomy: Lincoln left his legacy in his speeches, his letters, his inaugurals, in his errands of mercy.

A thorough search of lay and clerical speakers from Beecher down to the most modest eulogist, discloses this one dubious comparison between Moses and Lincoln. Neither entered the promised land, but both did, though not in the flesh. These men were not at their best, nor at the highest pinnacle—neither Moses at Pisgah, an old, worn-out soldier of the Lord—nor Lincoln on Good Friday in 1865; he, too, was visibly aging. Moses was at his best in Egypt defying Pharaoh. Moses was at his best at the Red Sea. Moses was at the height—the supreme point when he stood at the foot of Sinai, one half million men with their women and children saying: "Naaseh v'nishma." Moses rose no higher. Whether he concluded his miracles, completed the tabernacle, formulated the Code; whether he was successful in repelling

wanton attacks, the preparations for crossing the Jordan, or the following conquest of Trans-Jordania, he never rose higher than the moments at the Red Sea and on Mount Sinai. Lincoln never rose higher than he did at Bloomington, in the Douglas debates, in Cooper Union, his first and second inaugural and the climax—the Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln never rose higher than when he took hold of a dissolving government in Washington in 1861, confronted by a veritable sea of troubles. Lincoln never rose higher than he did after the three years of almost continuous defeats. When the whole chorus of cowards, traitors, spies, Southern propagandists, speculators, contractors and compromising statesmen were howling and screeching and hissing in his ears that the war was a failure and even the "friends of the North" were advocating and pleading in a "Prayer of Twenty Millions" to "Let the erring sisters go!"

Lincoln was never greater than when he tamed Seward and Chase and Stanton and the insubordinate McClellan. He was never greater than when he advised Meade to proceed after Lee and to destroy Lincoln's order if he succeeded, but to publish it if he failed.

Lincoln was never greater than when he called the great armies to the colors, than when he spent billions in defending the Republic. Lincoln was at his height when he picked Grant, Sherman, Farragut, Sheridan, Thomas and Ericsson. Then the giant frame began to weaken; then the overwrought mind began to show signs of fatigue; then his hair began to turn grey, so that Pisgah and Ford's Theater are not the happiest moments for comparing these two great giants of the ages.

Moses was aeons ahead of his time. Why? He was a seer; he analyzed, he saw unerringly and dragged his unwilling or blind followers after him.

Lincoln, a seer, ages ahead of his time, he saw unerringly and dragged his unwilling and blind followers after him. He had to convince Beecher, Wendel Phillips, Carl Schurz, Horace Greeley, Stephen A. Douglas. But when Israel saw and believed, Moses was no more, "and they mourned him thirty days."

And when the North—the entire tribe—saw and believed, Lincoln was no more, "and they mourned him thirty days."

The people, not the statesmen, at last awoke to an assured confidence in him. The army, not the generals in the field, admired him. He proved himself a revelation of personal manhood and official sufficiency. As he towered physically above other men, so he stood vitally above them in that crucial period of the Nation's life. When extraordinary human power was developed on every hand, he outclassed all others, and held the center of the stage, unrivalled in the majesty of his personal-

ity and influence. And so he has continued to stand through nearly seventy years, and today his colossal and sacrificial figure transcends that of every other American statesman in the temple of our National fame.

And thus it came to pass that when he was called to the Presidency, he was, of all living Americans, the one man who had been the best prepared by Providence, intellectually, morally and physically, to guide his people safely through its struggle for life. He grew in the great office as all true men grow, under great responsibilities. But the Presidency did not make Abraham Lincoln. The Presidency and the War of the Rebellion simply gave him his opportunity. He was ready. And when the hour struck, God's carefully prepared instrument was at hand, and when God called: "Abraham! Abraham!" Lincoln like Moses answered: "Hinayni," "Here am I!"